*Re-imagining Work, Family, and Community**

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Re-imagining Work, Family, and Community

I am thankful to have the opportunity to present some "thoughts-in-progress" at today's celebration. Over the past few years I have been researching two sets of literatures: community engagement and work-family. The timing of my research is fortunate, because many truly excellent books and articles have been published on these two topics, including Phyllis's own important contributions from the Cornell Couples and Careers Study. I'm beholden to her, and others, who have contributed to this huge outpouring of literature.

Let me first provide a little background on my own interests. I have worked with Mary Trigg and Mary Hartman at Rutgers Center for Women & Work, on a Sloan-funded project on work, family, and community. We interviewed managerial women working in three important sectors of N.J.'s economy: pharmaceutical, financial services, and IT. All the members of our sample were in dual-earner marriages, and all were in mid- to top-level managerial positions. Our work focused on three main research questions: (1) how do professional women define their communities? (2) what civic and other structures support women's ability to achieve success? and (3) how do professional women use their talents in support of their multiple communities? By design, we interviewed women who had successfully

negotiated work and family demands, at least to the extent they remained in the workforce. As a followup, we are now engaged in a Sloan-funded study examining the potential for workplace change in pharmaceuticals.

As I began to delve into the literatures on community and work-family, what struck me was how these traditions had developed along parallel tracks, intersecting on occasion but not in any systematic way. Both have been conceptualized around issues of time allocation, and both are often framed as dichotomies. Nonetheless, these literatures have evolved separately, are written by different scholars, and are published in different journals for different audiences. The community literature links declines in volunteering to changes in how Americans allocate their time (including women's time to paid work), and frames civic engagement dichotomously as either declining, or not. The work-family literature highlights the deleterious consequences of women's families to their careers (and vice versa), and juxtaposes allocation decisions between family and work as two competing and fundamentally incompatible options, at least for women. My paper links these literatures in theoretically more fruitful ways that will deepen our understanding of both. Examining the intersection of work, family, and community can enhance our ability to re-imagine how each of

these social worlds relates to and can be of service to the others. I use findings from my Sloan project to illustrate my developing perspective.

Community

Scholars writing about community in recent years have been more likely to lament its passing than celebrate its exemplars. Robert Putnam is the most prominent spokesperson for this thesis (Putnam 2000). Putnam points to the 1960s as the critical turning point when civic revival degenerated into civic decline. His list of declining civic institutions is long, including voting; informal socializing with friends; membership in labor unions, fraternal, and veteran groups; religious participation; PTA membership; and fewer family dinners, social visiting, and card playing (see also Wuthnow 1998:76-77). We are—as he so famously argues—"bowling alone." Declines in civic engagement represent foregone "social capital," in the form of social networks that have immense value as social "externalities" (p. 20). Lost to society are a "generalized reciprocity" and a trustworthiness that "lubricates social life" (p. 21). Lost to the individual are the very real benefits that can accrue from dense social networks, and "bridging social capital" that can provide access to much-needed resources and information (p. 22).

Putnam's explanation for these declines in civic engagement rests on changes over the years in *how we allocate our time*: he estimates that the pressures of time, and the growth of dual-earner families, account for about 10 percent of the decline. He attributes another 10 percent to suburbanization, urban sprawl, and increased commuting times, and 25 percent to people allocating more time to electronic entertainment. His major explanation, however, is that less civically involved baby boomers and Gen X'ers replaced those in the more active World War II-era, the so-called "greatest generation."

Much ink has been spilled over whether this decline really exists. Putnam himself notes that some groups have shown a resurgence: membership in professional, ethnic, hobby, sports, and fraternity groups are all up (Putnam 2000:59). Individual volunteering for charity or social service groups is also up (Wuthnow 1998:77), as are small groups (reading and literary groups), self-help support groups (AA, Al-Anon), and virtual communities (Wuthnow 1998:Ch. 9). And, Robert Wuthnow (1998) has argued that Americans have already begun to replace traditional forms of membership with new associational ties. In place of long-term, more durable organizational ties (e.g., the PTA, Elks) Americans are turning to "looser, more sporadic, ad hoc connections."

Viewing civic engagement in the context of work-family effectively moves us beyond a simplistic either/or framing—volunteering is either declining or not—to a more nuanced and useful understanding of community and how it has *changed*. To understand such changes one must take into account shifting family demographics, a dramatic increase in women's labor force participation, a shift from male- to dual-earner households, and women's increased representation in time-intensive professional and managerial occupations. One must also understand how the workplace is restructuring: it's more international, flexible, high tech, and service-oriented; inequalities are widening; and traditional notions of loyalty to one firm have declined, on the part of both workers and employers. As Harriet Presser (2003) has documented, we've moved to a 24/7 economy: more of us are working on nonstandard work schedules, or are working overtime, especially those in professional and managerial jobs. The consequence of these trends is that Americans—both men and women—are working harder, and sacrificing more leisure, than the citizens of nearly every other industrialized country.

Phyllis Moen and her colleagues (2003) argue that the consequences of these shifts represent a "structural mismatch" between changed family demographics and unchanged (or partially changed) customs, norms, and

organizational practices. This concept is an apt one for our purposes, given the effects of this mismatch on our collective community identity and involvement. The managerial women in our sample lived with this structural mismatch on a daily basis. As they balanced their desire for community service against family and work demands on their time, our respondents reconceptualized what it means to be civically engaged. They remained engaged in community service, albeit in quite different ways than their mothers. Like Putnam we found *few* respondents committed to membership organizations such as the PTA. Instead, their civic commitments were related to family, schools, churches/temples, and children's sports teams. They were also drawn into community service through their work, often blurring their own civic interests with those of their employer. Over half of our respondents also engaged in other community work, primarily for women's and children's support groups.

Do our results suggest "declining community" à la Putnam? If we accept Putnam's either-or framing of the question, you might agree that our respondents' community service has narrowed to a significant extent to "primary groups" such as family, extended family, or community groups with which their families intersect. Our respondents' community attachments were often at the expense of broader civic communities, the

"secondary groups" to which our respondents' mothers often donated their time.

Nonetheless, rejecting Putnam's dichotomous formulation is theoretically more fruitful. The work-family literature helps us to devise a more nuanced understanding of civic engagement, one that understands that community has *changed*—not *declined*—and that it varies by life cycle stage. We saw hints of this variation even in our limited sample of executive women. Much more work needs to be done to examine variation in community engagement across the life cycle. Researchers must adopt broader definitions of "community," definitions that include service to the community groups that intersect our family and work lives when these demands on our time are most intense. Such service still produces, as Putnam would define it, personal social networks *and* "social externalities that lubricate social life."

Work-Family

As the huge, and growing, literature on work-family tells us it's all about "choice:" how women allocate their time between two competing demands, work and family. Mary Blair-Loy's Competing Devotions (2003) well describes this stark work-family dichotomy. There is also a huge trade literature on this topic, with The Mommy Myth (2004) only the most recent

contribution to this genre. Both Competing Devotions and The Mommy Myth build on Sharon Hays's (1996) concept of "intensive mothering," and these books vividly demonstrate Hays's central thesis that motherhood is indeed a social construction.

Blair-Loy argues for the existence of two cultural "schemas:" cultural "ideal types" that are objective, semi-autonomous, and internalized. The "devotion to work schema" evolves because "greedy workplace institutions" demand all of our time and commitment. The "devotion to family schema" portrays intensive mothering as women's major commitment, regardless of her work role. These "schemas" powerfully shape not only women's attitudes and behaviors, but they are also embedded in the beliefs of their husbands, in the practices of their employers, and in workplace institutions more generally. When these schemas compete, as they invariably do in the lives of working mothers, work-family conflict inevitably ensues.

Blair-Loy's work is compelling in a number of ways. Rather than depict work-family choice as simply the outcome of two competing *identities*, she describes how the powerful force of culture fosters deeply moral and emotional responses to life's difficult choices. Work-family decisions become profoundly moral choices, and women must commit to *either* work *or* family. Such "wrenching" decisions represent a fundamental

conflict between two quite different moral definitions of how to be a good parent and how to be a good worker.

Blair-Loy's cultural argument is a good starting point for rethinking explanations for work-family choice. Her cultural schemas provide a good *description* of how women perceive, and articulate, their struggles to negotiate work and family lives. It also describes how women struggle with these choices on an *individual* level. Like Blair-Loy's respondents, our N.J. managerial women vividly described how the structural mismatch operated in their own lives: they and their families bore the individual burden of "working out" solutions to these competing schemas. They could not imagine a restructured workplace that would allow them to better accommodate their work and family lives. The workplace they confronted—its need for economic efficiency, its high level of competition, its requisite long hours, and their long commutes—were simply givens, constraints they needed to "work around." And, that they did in highly *individual* ways.

Despite its *descriptive* appeal, we need a more satisfying and comprehensive *explanation* for work-family choice than Blair-Loy and others provide. My worry about focusing on the "powerful and invasive role of culture" is that we run the risk of reifying the role these schemas play in

work-family choice. Schemas become structure, structure becomes embedded in social institutions, and workplace change is nearly impossible to envision. We already know that the behaviors and attitudes these cultural schemas describe are not natural, nor universal. Sharon Hays well describes the cultural roots of the ideology of intensive mothering: work-family choice is historically, geographically, and culturally contingent, and varies as well by class and race/ethnicity. Change can occur, even in the face of "all-powerful, invasive schemas."

So what are the ingredients for a more satisfactory explanation of work-family choice? I believe we need to re-imagine the work-family-community nexus. First and foremost, we need a model that takes sufficient account of workplace inequalities that *independently* structure women's work and family options. One could well imagine causality operating in exactly the opposite direction than Blair-Loy describes: change agents within the workplace produce structural change, which in turn speeds larger cultural change. Joan Williams's (2000) theory of *reconstructive feminism* offers a useful alternative on which to build. The explanatory burden in this model is squarely on workplace inequality shaping women's *and* men's work and family choices. If the workplace were differently organized, and if society's entitlements were differently implemented, women (and men)

could more easily accommodate parenting and work. Such a strategy would reduce the moral conflict Blair-Loy sees as inherent in the current system, *and* speed cultural change. We need more creative solutions within the workplace to retain valuable workers and reduce negative work-family spillage.

Second, focusing on workplace change is necessary but not sufficient. As I intimated earlier, we need to "bring in community." We need explanations that link workplace organizations to community (including government) institutions and resources. Such community partnerships can provide support for working families reeling from the structural mismatch between changing family demographics and unchanged workplace structures. It is curious that few researchers have addressed this work-family-community link.[1] One person who makes an argument similar to mine is Ann Bookman, in her 2004 book, Starting in Our Own Backyards. Bookman argues as well that we need to (re-)embed our studies of both work and family in community, and her investigation of the work, family, and community lives of 50 biotech workers and their families does exactly that. She documents how workplace and community institutions can build work-family support systems, a supportive "social infrastructure" for working

[1] Patricia Voydanoff (2001) has usefully provided a theoretical framework for conceptualizing work, family, and community as "microsystems," linked at the "mesosystem" level and affected by contextual factors (such as changing family demographics and restructured work) operating at the macro level.

families. Like our N.J. managers, Bookman's respondents described a supportive web of extended family, neighbors, Y's, and childcare centers that helped them cope with work-family demands. Yet, these webs of support were all individually cobbled together, and they often failed. The value of Bookman's work lies not so much in documenting *existing* community partnerships—they are few and far between. Rather, her analysis enables us to visualize a move beyond such private solutions toward partnerships involving "new employer policies, new public policies, and enhanced community support" (p. 74).

Third, we need to move beyond the stark dichotomy that frames women's choices as *either* "work-devoted" *or* "family-devoted." To the contrary, women have long chosen both: like men, women want rich and satisfying work lives, *and* rich and satisfying family lives. They are both workers *and* mothers, *at the same time*. Williams argues that many former professionals would prefer to be employed, if only they could "make it work." This seems inconsistent with Blair-Loy's claim that these are deeply moral choices that differentiate those devoted to family vs. work. Similarly, many of the stay-at-home moms Ann Bookman interviewed also preferred to keep their foot in the labor-market door by working part time. Anita Garey's (1999) work shows further that this is not just a recent phenomenon:

the labor-market work of "home-makers" has long been invisible, even to their own families, and even back in the traditional 1950s.

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Embedding the work-family choice within communities helps us to move beyond this stark choice between work *or* family. It moves us toward explanations that theorize the role communities can play in partnering with workplace organizations and the government to alleviate the effects of the structural mismatch. It might be trite to say it, but it should indeed "take a village" to raise our kids. And, community—in partnership with employers and the government—can indeed play a kind of mediating role in reducing at least the structurally-induced effects of intensive mothering.

Our re-imagined workplace would recognize a multidimensional model of work-family choice that reflects the diversity of women's lived experiences. There are indeed women who prefer to devote all their time and energy to their families. And, certainly there are those who prefer to commit themselves solely to work. The vast majority of working women, I believe, are someplace in between—committed parents *and* committed workers. Our N.J. respondents described work *and* family as their two most important "communities." It's important, at a minimum, to differentiate

women who are primarily family-committed from those who would prefer to be in the labor market, but just can't "make it work."

Pamela Stone provides evidence to support the claim that women who have "chosen" to stay at home are indeed a varied group (Stone and Lovejoy (forthcoming). In her study of professional women who left the workforce, she challenges the "rhetoric of choice" arguments typically used in this field. Unlike Blair-Loy, who focuses on the moral imperatives of intensive mothering, Stone describes how many women seek workplace accommodation, albeit unsuccessfully. Her respondents quit their jobs only as a last resort, typically after unsuccessful attempts to reconcile work and family demands. Stone's data also suggest that women often quit *not* when their children are born (as Blair-Loy's model would suggest), but rather when their children reach school-age, when the *real* work-family crunch hits. Like our respondents, these working women have achieved a work identity that is *as* important to them as their family identity. Without flexibility, however, and without workplace accommodations, rigid workplaces (and rigid schools) can't accommodate women's—and increasingly men's—demanding work and family lives.

To date, we haven't traversed very far into the re-imagined workplace I've described. Bookman is hopeful, as she describes the roles communities

can play to buffer working families from the vagaries of the restructured economy (p. 77). At the outset, we need to broaden our definitions of community: our families, neighbors, local geographic communities, religious institutions, and work-based friendships are all critical to our sense of community (p. 112). Bookman points to childcare and after-school programs as critical building blocks of a social infrastructure for working families. To the extent that local communities are successful in providing such resources, they enhance civil society through parent-to-provider networks, and they also foster parent-to-parent (and family-to-family) connections (p. 176-77). Community-based scout programs, sports leagues, and religious-affiliations provide additional such community links. These are bridging networks that should make even a skeptical Putnam proud.

Much work remains to be done in the workplace as well. Many of the current organizationally-based HR policies are too narrowly focused to provide much support for working families. The HR ideology of work-family balance is just too weak to compete with the power of the work devotion schema. Current HR strategies often take for granted existing *workplace practices and structures* incompatible with caregiving responsibilities. Too many workplace policies merely provide substitute caregiving, keeping women on the job for longer hours. While this may be

good for employers, it's not good for women, men, or their families. What we need is real institutional change. For example, what our N.J. respondents really wanted—and, given their stature, typically had—was autonomy and flexibility. It was this flexibility that allowed them to negotiate their work and family lives on a day-to-day basis.

Some firms have adopted bolder visions that allow flexibility over the life course and not just day-to-day or week-to-week. A recent Wall St. Journal article (Chaker, 2003) describes a Deloitte & Touche program that allows employees to take an unpaid leave for up to five years; training sessions and mentors are provided for those taking advantage of these leaves. This program is similar to one at IBM that allows selected workers to take leaves for up to three years, *with* benefits. IBM also instituted a "new-concept part-time" program that allows high-status, career-oriented employees to work reduced hours. Such programs are responsive to internal employee demands, in that they ease re-entry for executives on leave. They are also responsive to the bottom line because they cut turnover costs. Employers choose such programs because they want to "win the war for talent" (Hill et al., 2004:123). Research on this "new-concept part-time" program suggests that without the program well over half would have left IBM to find a more flexible job, and another quarter would have stayed

home full-time (Hill et al., 2004:131). Such findings are consistent with Stone's conclusions that many of the stay-at-home moms she interviewed would have preferred to remain in the workforce (Stone and Lovejoy, forthcoming).

In sum, theorists of community and theorists of work-family would do well to more fully link their research traditions. Examining the intersection of work, family, and community enhances our ability to re-imagine how each of these social worlds relates to and can be of service to the others.

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